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SUBJECT: ESTONIA OFFERS FREE CITIZENSHIP COURSES

¶11. (U) Summary. The number of stateless people living in Estonia has declined significantly since 1992. A new program to provide citizenship training to non-citizens is being jointly funded by the GOE and the EU. It will help up to 10,000 more stateless people meet the qualifications for citizenship. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has pledged to increase by one third the 2006 budget of the Non-Estonian Integration Foundation, which administers the courses and conducts other work designed to integrate non-citizens into Estonian society. End Summary.

¶12. (U) Since 1992, Estonian citizenship by naturalization has been granted to about 140,000 people. Last November, the number of those naturalized surpassed that of stateless people, so-called "gray passport holders," who currently make up approximately 9 percent of Estonia's population, or about 131,000 individuals. To become Estonian citizens, gray passport holders must fulfill certain residency requirements, earn an Estonian language lower-level proficiency certificate, and pass a citizenship exam. As the citizenship exam is given only in Estonian, poor language skills present a significant obstacle to many Russian speakers wishing to obtain citizenship.

¶13. (U) The Non-Estonians' Integration Foundation (NEIF) is a GOE-founded and funded institution with the objective of initiating, supporting, and coordinating projects aimed at the integration of Estonian society. According to surveys conducted by the NEIF, approximately 60 percent of the remaining stateless people would like to acquire Estonian citizenship. In response to these findings, last summer the NEIF announced a joint 7.98 million EEK effort (approximately USD \$652,000) with the EU to offer free nationwide citizenship courses. Training will be organized for up to 10,000 people, including 3,000 school children attending Russian language schools. A total of 80 instructors were trained and certified to teach the courses. While instruction is mainly in Estonian, instructors are equipped to switch back and forth between Estonian and Russian to ensure classroom comprehension. Starting on July 31, the NEIF began offering the course in Tallinn, Johvi, Narva, and Tartu. To date, a total of 2,341 people have registered for the extended (25-hour) and the abbreviated (5-hour) courses; 494 students have completed the long course and 215 the short course. The program also offers its graduates the opportunity to take the citizenship exam at the different class sites each week. Normally, the exam is only offered once a month at the Examination and Qualification Centers in Tallinn, Narva, Tartu, and Kohtla Jarve.

¶14. (U) Although many course attendees still lack sufficient Estonian language skills to pass the citizenship exam, the NEIF points out that in taking the initiative to attend after-work classes, stateless people are demonstrating their motivation and perseverance to become Estonian citizens. A Political Section Assistant recently attended one of the Tallinn classes and was encouraged by

the level of student participation and motivation he witnessed. When asked, many students indicated that they would also be interested in attending after-work Estonian language courses if offered. (Note. Currently, those who successfully obtain an Estonian language lower-level proficiency certificate may apply to the Government for reimbursement of the cost of the Estonian language classes they took in preparation for the exam. The Government will not, however, pre-pay for the classes. End Note.) The citizenship project, which is scheduled to run through August 2007, also includes an information campaign to promote more citizenship applications. In recognition of the effectiveness of the citizenship programs, the Ministry of Education has pledged to increase the NEIF's 2006 budget by one third, from 20 to 30 million Kroons, (approximately from USD \$1,634,000 to USD \$2,451,000).

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